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AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY OF MSS.

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So long as Archæology keeps digging at the heaps of ancient ruins in Palestine or Assyria, or searching the tombs of Egypt, and so long as there are libraries of musty manuscripts yet unexplored and uncatalogued, the students of Biblical history and criticism may yet hope for new light from the past itself upon many perplexing problems. Was not Tischendorf rewarded in his search at Mt. Sinai by the valuable discovery of a new text of the New Testament? And in 1873 the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" with its important testimony to the constitution and teachings of the early church, was brought to light. And now another rich find is to give its witness in aid of historical and critical study.

The known extent of the early Christian writings has always far exceeded the amount that has been actually transmitted to us. What we know of them must be gathered chiefly from the few fragments quoted in patristic works, and by careful inferences from their contents and settings. With such scant sources at hand, all investigators of New Testament books and of the development of Christianity in the first centuries greet with eager interest the addition which has just been made to our early Christian literature. This is, in fact, none other than the discovery of extensive portions of the so-called 'Revelation of Peter,' and the 'Gospel of Peter.' These writings, together with large fragments of the apocalyptic book of Enoch, are contained in a Greek manuscript, belonging probably to the twelfth century, recently found by French scholars in a tomb in Upper Egypt. They have just been published by the French Archæological Commission in Egypt, and will also shortly appear,

with comments by Prof. Harnack, of the University of Berlin, in the records of the Berlin Academy of Sciences.

The two works ascribed to Peter belong to a class of apocryphal literature which gained extensive dimensions during the second century. Acts of Peter and Paul and other apostles, their preaching, their revelations, and, above all, a mass of gospels were written, partly to satisfy the eager and legend-loving curiosity of the expanding church, partly to embody some particular shade of dogmatic teaching. The latter was especially the case among the Gnostics. Of these Apocryphal gospels, bearing often apostolic names, such as James, Matthew, Thomas, etc., more or less considerable portions of seven have been handed down to us, (*cf.* Tischendorf's edition), and beyond this some thirty or more are known by quoted fragments or by name alone. Of real Christian apocalyptic literature on the other hand, we have comparatively little, notwithstanding its fruitfulness on Jewish soil. Eusebius in his Church History mentions four works ascribed to Peter: his Acts, Gospel, Preaching and Revelation, while Jerome adds still another: the Judgment of Peter. And considering the apostle's importance in the early church, it is not surprising that the tendency to attribute apostolic authorship to later writings should have brought so many under his name.

Our first knowledge of the Gospel according to Peter, comes from Serapion, who was Bishop of Antioch, about the close of the second century. He found it in use, as Eusebius tells us, by the church in Cilicia, and at first, not having examined it closely, he made no objection against it, but later, discovering that it contained traces of the Docetic heresy, he wrote a refutation of it and probably forbade its use. Origen also mentions it. Both Eusebius and Jerome speak of it as a heretical work. In fact, the discovered gospel, the greater part of which is the description of Our Lord's Passion (as is the case in many Gnostic gospels) justifies these accusations by its traces of Docetism. The interesting feature of the Revelation of Peter is its close race with the Revelation of John for a place in the Canon of the New Testament. The Canon of the Muratorian Fragment (200

A. D.) accepts it along with John, noting, however, some dissenting opinions (*"Apocalypses etiam Johannis et Petri tantum recipimus, quam quidam ex nostris legi in ecclesia nolunt"*). Clement of Alexandria reckons it among the so-called Antilegomena, or disputed Scriptures, whereas other catalogues consider it genuine, inspired, and canonical. Eusebius recognizes that its use was not universal, and hence throws it into a subordinate class, while Sozomen calls it spurious, but says it was publicly read once a year in the Palestinian churches. From this doubtful position it was finally excluded by the admission of John alone to the universal canon. Its length is said to have been 270 *stichoi*, or lines, but its contents up to the present time have scarcely been known. Its investigation may now help to decide the question how far the apocalypse, as a literary product, belongs to the Christian Church. Undoubtedly the apocalyptic spirit ruled completely the life of the early Christian communities, but whether the apocalypse itself was ever an independent product of Christianity is still a question of criticism.

Both the Gospel and the Revelation of Peter are, therefore, most probably the work of the second century, and it seems likely that their close examination will bring to light many interesting points for the history both of the Canon and the Church. Even the name given them is a striking illustration of the characteristic inclination of that age toward the emphasis on apostolicity. For the third part of the manuscript, the Book of Enoch, the interest lies chiefly on the textual side, as the contents of the book are already known through an Ethiopic version.

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